



# Wildflower verges

Those of you who are old enough may remember meadows full of flowers in midsummer or may even recall helping with the hay harvest at the end of June. Silage production has largely replaced haymaking today, and meadows have been ploughed, reseeded and fertilised to become productive monocultures of grass. Agricultural intensification has resulted in a 97% decline in unimproved neutral grassland between 1934 and 1984, and losses have continued since at around 2% a year. It is not surprising that many of our once common wild flowers are becoming rare, and with them the insects that feed on them.

Lowland meadows are a priority habitat for the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, where they are taken to include not only hay meadows and unimproved pastures but also churchyard and roadside verges. The Plumpton Habitat Survey identified very few remaining unimproved meadows in the parish but our roadside verges looked as if they may be among the last areas where meadow flowers still flourish.

Some of you may have noticed a few safety-vest clad parishioners surveying the verges this spring. The Habitat and Wildlife Group decided to survey all our wider verges to see what grows there and, when we have the results, to come up with the ideal form of management to enhance their value for wildlife and the pleasure for people. We will continue the surveys through the summer and anyone who wishes to join in will be very welcome.

Pond surveys have been progressing this spring, with a primary focus on great crested newts, but these too will continue, collecting information on other species and water quality. Jonathan Wood is organising these and would welcome help. He would also like to thank the owners of ponds for allowing access for the newt survey and for their interest and co-operation.

Jacqui Morris  
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